SYSTEMS THEORY AND LITERATURE: APPLICATION OF INTERPRETIVE STRUCTURAL MODELLING TO THE SELECTED LITERARY WORKS *CILAPPATIKARAM* (5-6th Century) *WHERE DID I LEAVE MY PURDAH* (2013) *THE DJINNS OF EIDGAH* (2013) *THE VANISHING HALF* (2020) *THE UNRAVELING OF CASSIDY HOLMES* (2020) *THE WHITE TIGER* (2021)

A

Synopsis

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> I suggest that what is at present missing from literary criticism is a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole. - Northrop Frye (8)

The twenty first century is characterized by global consciousness, universalism and transdisciplinary outlook. In the last three–four decades, Literary Studies has also witnessed a paradigm shift with the mushrooming of theories which draw upon non- literary disciplines such as Philosophy, Psychology, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology etc., thus making it more expansive and interdisciplinary.

Literary Criticism originated as an assessment of literature and gave room to Literary Theory. Literary Theory is a systematic study of the nature of literature and of the methods of analyzing literature. Literary Theory is a body of concepts and ideas used in the efficient analysis of literature. It plays an important and significant role in the analysis of literary works. It is an account of the basic elements and aspects, through which literary works can be studied. Literary Theory offers different approaches for understanding the function and role of the actual and historical background in the interpretation as well as the relevance of the innate and unconscious aspects of the text.

According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "The formal study and discussion of works of literature, like by judging and explaining their importance and meaning is called literary theory." *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines literary theory as, "the field of study concerned with the principles underlying the analysis and understanding of literary works." It is literary theory that develops a relationship between the author and the work.

Today, literary theories are at the crossroads of all disciplines and draw ideas from many other scholarly fields such as Psychology, Anthropology, Gender Studies, Environment Studies, Linguistics and others, thus giving rise to 'interdisciplinarity'. Interdisciplinary approaches involve the combining of two or more academic disciplines or more specifically, an integration of their methods and concepts in order to solve a defined problem.

A noteworthy feature of modern literary studies is the use of non- literary insights and concepts for better interpretation of literature. Literary scholars have become more open and relate literature to other disciplines, thus encouraging collaboration and integration. The concepts and theories of Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, Quantum Physics and Theology etc., have now

become an integral part of the contemporary literary studies. Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism etc., are some major developments in the realm of Literary Studies.

In recent times Literary Studies has witnessed further expansion with the efforts of some literary scholars who have provided a new dimension to it by relating literature to Systems Science. According to Peter Checkland, a famous Systems Scientist, Systems Science is a transdisciplinary subject. Systems Science with its transdiciplinary concepts provides us a way of achieving this intellectual unity.

According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "A system is a way of doing things. It is an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex or a unitary whole."According to *Collins Dictionary*, "A system is a way of working, organizing or doing something which follows a fixed plan or set of rules."

The Systems Theory is based on Aristotle's pronouncement, 'a whole is more than the sum of its parts'. Holism was the key postulate of General Systems Theory developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, a biologist, in the 1950s. Peter Checkland (2007), terms Systems Theory as a meta-discipline and states:

> Systems Thinking and Systems Practice differs from other disciplines in the sense that 'it is a subject which can talk about other subjects. It is not a discipline to be put in the same set as the others. It is a meta- discipline whose subject matter can be applied within virtually any other discipline'. (25)

The roots of Systems Thinking can be traced back to Vedic and Greek times. Thinkers and philosophers of the East as also of the West believed in an underlying unity in all phenomena, appearances and objects in nature and its creation. However, Systems Science as a transdisciplinary discipline emerged in the second half of the twentieth century.

The term 'Systems Theory' was coined in 1949 in a book entitled '*General Systems Theory'* by the Austrian-American biologist Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who considered a general system as any theoretical system of interest in different disciplines. His theory transcended the traditional disciplinary boundaries and led to the emergence of various inter-related and corresponding elements of several disciplines into a whole. Therefore, it is rightly stated that Systems Theory bridges the gap

between Science and Humanities as the concepts of this theory are flexible in nature. It leads to the elimination of the age old differences and gaps between literature and Science.

The shift from segregation to aggregation in Science, acquired greater momentum in the decades after World War ll with the initiatives of Cyberneticists like Norbert Weiner and Marin Mazur, Mathematicians like Anatol Rapaport, Philosophers like Ervin Laszlo, Psychologists like Russel L. Ackoff and Fred E. Emery, Computer Scientists like Gerald M. Weinberg, to name a few who entered the sphere of Systems Science from various specialized disciplines. Just as one may adopt 'a Scientific Approach' in any discipline, one may adopt 'a Systems Approach' in any subject.

Though Systems Theory was an offshoot of organismic biology, it soon branched into humanities and other scientific disciplines. Researchers from various disciplines started moving out of their overtly specialized disciplines for collaborative interdisciplinary studies. Their goal was to study how systems of various kinds function, how to deal with complex situations and develop general principles and theories having wider applicability. Christopher Jargodzki (2006) reiterates the importance of holistic approach advocated by Systems Theory:

> Emergent and cooperative phenomenon display synergy i.e. for them the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as is characteristic of non-linear systems. Much of nature is non-linear including most of what is really interesting in the world. (34)

Central to Systems Theory is the concept of 'System'. Peter Checkland (2007) explains the concept of 'system' employed in Systems Theory:

> The central concept 'system' embodies the idea of a set of elements connected together which form a whole, this showing properties which are properties of the whole, rather than properties of its component parts. The taste of water, for example, is a property of the substance water, not of the hydrogen and oxygen which combine to form it. (51)

In a generic sense, systems are there everywhere in the world; from the solar system to the rail network systems, social systems, natural systems, the internet and the World Wide Web and many more. In fact, the entire universe is one system, made up of several interconnected and interacting parts or elements. Referring to the application of Systems Theory to literature, eminent Systems Scientist and the founder of Systems Society of India, Revered Prof. P.S. Satsangi states:

> Literary systems are perceived intuitive systems which belong to the typology of human activity systems rather than other types such as natural systems, designed physical or designed abstract systems. Accordingly, they represent soft ill-defined problems or concepts or situations which are complex. (46)

The concepts of Systems Theory can be applied with equal efficacy even to literature. Within the Systems theoretical framework, a literary text becomes a 'literary system', meaning hereby, as a system, the text and its elements do not exist in isolation, but are related to one another and also to the environment. A poem becomes more than the sum of its words when the stylistic and rhetorical devices are put together. Piotr Sadowski (1999), a renowned literary theorist who applied Systems theory to literature, explains:

> Like humans with their culture, literature belongs to the middle-sized systems, and it too reveals a hierarchical structure: an individual text can be viewed as a system consisting of interrelated elements such as plot, character, scene, motifs, images and so on, while the text itself can be seen in a larger context as an element of the author's oeuvre, of a literary trend, period and so on. (8)

Systems Science offers a variety of transdisciplinary theories which can be applied to a variety of systems in various disciplines. There is an ample choice for scholars to choose an appropriate theory for their study. To name some renowned theories- Interpretive Structural Modelling(ISM), Nominal Group Technique(NGT), Generalized Physical Systems Theory Modelling (GPST), Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) etc.

Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) was given by the famous Systems scientist, John N. Warfield in 1974. It focuses on discovering the relationships among the different elements, which tend to focus on a specific issue or a problem. It is a well-defined methodology for identifying the relationships among the elements and deals with defining complex issues that occur due to the presence of large number of elements in a system. It helps in structuring the numerous elements present in a system into an organized and systematic manner.

So, the abstract and vague interactions of a system are presented through structural modelling using ISM. It is based on the elementary notions of Graph Theory. ISM is a method in which through the graph models, the complex issues are structured in a systematic manner. These graph models provide clarity of thought and concretize the abstract idea.

ISM model is taken into consideration, when a complex issue or complex system has to be represented in a systematic and logical manner. This methodology represents with clarity how various elements in a system are interconnected and interact with one another. By applying ISM we tend to develop a structure on the basis of the interaction and relationship among these elements.

The proposed study aims to investigate the applicability of ISM methodology in the field of literature. ISM has been widely applied in the fields of Management, Science and Engineering but in the field of literature, it is still foreign to us. For this applicational study, the following literary works have been taken:

1. Brit Bennett's famous novel *The Vanishing Half*
2. Elissa R. Sloan's novel, *The Unraveling of Cassidy Holmes*
3. Abhishek Majumdar's play, *The Djinns Of Eidgah*
4. Mahesh Dattani's famous drama, *Where Did I Leave My Purdah*
5. Ilango Adigal's renowned narrative poem and a Tamil epic poem, *Cilappatikaram*
6. *The White Tiger*, a film adaptation of the Man Booker Prize winning novel by Aravind Adiga.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett, published in 2020, is a famous novel to be listed most frequently in the bestselling lists of the contemporary times and was selected as the New York Times bestseller. The story of the novel revolves around the lives of two twin sisters, Desiree Vignes and Stella Vignes, who had been inseparable from each other since the childhood. But due to certain circumstances, they decide to lead their lives in two completely different and extremely contrary communities i.e., white and black. As the novel progresses, their lives get intertwined. The novelist has shown multiple components and generations of the family highlighting emotions, relationships and at the backdrop of the story, is the American history. It is a tale about American life incorporating relationships, family and sisterhood.

Brit Bennett is a New York bestselling author. She is an American based writer born in Los Angeles in 1990. She earned her graduation from Stanford University. She won a Hopwood Award in short fiction and Hurston Award for college writers in 2014. Both her novels, *The Mothers* and *The Vanishing Half* have been selected for New York Times Bestseller. In 2021, she has been acclaimed as one of the Time's Next 100 influential people. She has also achieved a stature as National Book Foundation 5 Under 35 honouree.

The Unraveling of Cassidy Holmes by Elissa R. Sloan, published in 2020, is an enthralling novel incorporating the rise and fall of a famous pop star, Cassidy and her teammates. The story is told through multiple narratives and perspectives i.e., from the point of view of four different people. It

shows how the lives of all the characters transform after their sudden collapse and the most shocking of all being the death of the main singer of the group, Cassidy, through suicide. The plot of the novel deals with the dark side of the life of a celebrity and also highlights how hard is to deal with the ups and downs in the industry.

Elissa R. Sloan is a writer, professional photographer and an artist. She was born in Texas. Her works incorporate the importance of representation in media and stories. Her interest in celebrity life is quite visible in her works.

The Djinns of Eidgah by Abhishek Majumdar is a play published and staged in 2013 for the first time in Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Sloane Square. The plot of the play revolves around the lives of two orphaned siblings, Bilal and Ashrafi, stuck in Kashmir due to the violent riots. At the backdrop of the play, the dramatist has highlighted that the Kashmiri people lead traumatized lives due to the fear of wars and tend to escape it. Majumdar has highlighted the loss of beautiful Kashmir in the darkness of conflict and war.

Abhishek Majumdar is a dramatist, theatre director, teacher and an actor. He is a renowned playwright who has won various awards for his commendable writings. He is a recipient of Hindu MetroPlus Playwright's Award, Toto Funds the Arts award and META award. His play, *Rizwaan* was selected for the first festival of Contemporary Indian Theatre in Paris.

Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdaah*, is about a famous former actress, Nazia, who mourns remembering her glorious days in theatre. The story revolves around her nostalgia for the historical theatre and the complex relationships she shares with her close ones. As the play progresses, it unravels three stages i.e., recreating the historical play Shakuntala; a sub-plot revolving around the love life of Nazia and Suhail; the troubled relationship between Nazia and her niece, Ruby.

Mahesh Dattani, born in 1958, is a famous playwright, film-maker, screen writer and a stage director. He is the first playwright in English who won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998. His plays mostly incorporate social issues. He has many famous plays to his credit like *Tara, Final Solutions, Dance Like a Man, Night Queen* etc.

Cilappatikaram (The Tale of an Anklet), a Tamil epic poem by Ilanko Atikal, is one of the literary masterpieces of the world. It explicates the problems that humanity has been dealing with for a

long time i.e., love, war, the inevitability of death, evil and God's justice. The three books highlight the three distinct phases through which the narrative moves; the erotic, the mythic and the heroic. It is considered as one of the five great epics of the Tamil Literature. It is to Tamils what *Iliad* is to Greeks i.e., the story of their civilization.

The White Tiger (2021) is a film adaptation based on Man Booker Prize novel written by Aravind Adiga. It is the story of a poor but an extremely ambitious boy, Balram, who uses his intellect and wit to rise over the rigid caste system prevailing in the society. The film highlights the journey of Balram from rags to riches as he, a poor driver in the beginning, becomes a successful businessman at the end. This film adaptation has been acclaimed as one of the finest and most successful literary adaptations of the current times. The film stars Priyanka Chopra, Rajkumar Rao and Adarsh Gourav in the lead roles and is directed by Ramin Bahrani, a successful director of the present times.

The literature review conducted reveals that some research initiatives have been taken in the application of Systems Theory in literature with reference to other systems methodologies, but, so far, no in depth research work has been undertaken in the application of Interpretive Structural Modelling in literature. Following are some important research initiatives in the domain of literature:

A research conducted by Dr. Bani Dayal Dhir on the topic, 'A Study of Emergentism and High End Complexity in Literary Systems', examines the relevance and validity of the transdisciplinary theory i.e., the Systems Theory in terms of interpretation in literature. Another research entitled, 'Systems Theory and Literary Analysis: The Second Generation Indo- American Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rishi Reddy and Shauna Singh Baldwin' by Dr. Malvika Gupta studies the application of key concepts of the approaches of Piotr Sadowski, Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova to the literary texts.

An article entitled 'On Literature and Systems Theory', published on an online library, 'CiteSeer' (2001), by Florian Crammer examines the relationship between literature and Systems Theory. The writer has explained that how the Systems Theory bridges the gap between Science and Humanities. Cristina Mele, Jacqueline Pels and Francesco Polese, published an article on the topic, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theory and their Manangerial Applications' (2010), in which they have focused on the connection between the key aspects of Systems Theory i.e., totality and wholeness and

Aristotle's concept of Holism. In an article published on 'Research Gate' (2012), by Professor Sushil, entitled, 'Interpreting the Interpretive Structural Model', analyzed the characteristics and features of the approach.

The works selected for the proposed study have drawn the interest of the researchers but not from the point of view of this theory. A review published in 'The Guardian' (June 23, 2020) written by Colin Grant, entitled, '*The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennet- Two Faces of the Black Experience' examines the novel, *The Vanishing Half* as an experience of the twins in two different worlds i.e. the white and the black. In a review published by 'The New York Times' (May 29, 2020) written by Ayana Mathis, entitled, 'A Novel imagines the Fate of the Twin Sisters, One Passing for the White', the reviewer has analyzed and explored the changes occurred in the lives of both the sisters. She says that, "the novel is a tension between personal freedom and responsibility to a community".

An article published in 'Study Breaks' (December 3, 2020), written by Eva Mccarthy Minuez, entitled, '*The Unraveling of Cassidy Holmes*- Exploring the Tragic Side of Entertainment Culture' examines the novel *The Unraveling of Cassidy Holmes* by Elissa R. Sloan as a story revealing the darker and violent side of the entertainment industry.

A review published (October 22, 2013) on the play *The Djinns of Eidgah* in 'The Guardian' written by Michael Billington explores it as a depiction of personal human conflict as well as political issues in Kashmir. Monika Kaushik and Suman Sigroha (mellow.in, 2019) conducted a research on the drama, *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* by Mahesh Dattani on the topic, 'Facticity and Fictionality: Mahesh Dattani's *Where Did I Leave My Purdah'.* The researchers have examined the play as a literary representation of the partition. It has been shown as a means of presenting the suppression and marginalization of women.

A paper published on the Tamil epic poem, *Cilappatikaram* by Ilanko Atikal, in 'Academia' (2000) by R.K.K Rajarajan, entitled, 'Dance of Ardhanari as Pattini-Kannaki with special reference to the Cilappatikaram', takes into consideration the importance of the deity of Pattini-Kannaki, its comparisons with many gods and goddesses.

These literary works have been explored by various researchers from different angles. The literature review of the selected works reveals that they have not been analyzed and examined from the

perspective of Systems Theory. To assess the applicability and relevance of ISM methodology in literature, the range of literary works has been kept wide. The literary works have been selected from different genres instead of keeping the study genre specific.

The objectives for the proposed study are:

1. To discuss in detail, the origin, development and various aspects of Systems Theory.
2. To apply Interpretive Structural Modelling methodology to the selected literary works.
3. To make a stylistic analysis of the selected literary works.
4. To examine the merits and relevance of Systems Theory in general and Interpretive Structural Modelling in particular in literary domain.

In the light of the above objectives, the chapter scheme of the proposed study would be:

1. CHAPTER 1 - Introduction
2. CHAPTER 2 - *The Vanishing Half* and *The Unraveling of Cassidy Holmes*: A Study with Reference to Interpretive Structural Modelling
3. CHAPTER 3 – *The Djinns of Eidgah* and *Where Did I Leave My Purdah*: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Interpretive Structural Modelling
4. CHAPTER 4 – Film as a System: Interpretive Structural Modelling of *The White Tiger*
5. CHAPTER 5- *Cilappatikaram*: An Implementation of Interpretive Structural Modelling
6. CHAPTER 6- A Stylistic Study of the Selected Literary works
7. CHAPTER 7 – Conclusion

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